

# Keeping the Flame Burning



**June 28, 1998**

**Thrust statement:** Every Christian's desire should be to fan the fire of zeal for the Lord.

**Scripture reading:** 2 Timothy 1:6; 2:2

It is with deep sorrow that I close my ministry with this congregation after seventeen years of preaching and teaching. Many in this congregation, since I began my ministry here, have become young men and women. Some are now leaders in this congregation. Many have married and now have small children. Many have become much older in the last seventeen years. I was only forty-seven when I began my ministry here; I now conclude my ministry with Grassy at the age of sixty-four. Time is flying by. I hope that all of us have grown in our understanding of Jesus and what He has accomplished for us in our salvation. I believe that every one has learned a great deal more in skillful handling the written Revelation of God; all of us have grown together. Today, I know a lot more about how to teach the Word of God correctly than I did when I first came here. A few months ago, when I realized that my ministry with Grassy would terminate on June 28, 1998, I decided to write most of my sermons and Bible studies in order to leave some of my teachings from the Holy Scriptures to assist you in your own Bible studies and in your daily walk with God. My prayer is that you will utilize these studies to assist you in doing home Bible studies, in leading others to Christ, and encouraging those already in the faith.

I thank all of you for your spiritual and financial support for the past several years. Hopefully, you have grown in faith during my work with Grassy. I want each of you to know that I love everyone of you and that I will miss all of you very much. Since I do not have the time to discuss what your individual relationships have meant to me for the past seventeen years, I, nevertheless, do want to mention two men in particular. I am especially appreciative for the many insights from the Scriptures that Ancil Farris has shared with me over the years. I think that I am much more mature in my judgment as a result of his

keen understanding of the Word. I also am deeply indebted to Pat Kilpatrick for insisting that I write for his journal (*Ensign*). Prior to writing for his paper, I had written only three articles for other publications. I appreciate the patience that Pat manifested toward me in helping me to learn to write. If it had not been for Pat, I probably would never have started my writing career. As a result of his help, I am now able to reach many people whom I could not have reached otherwise. Since I began my ministry here, I have completed the B.A., M.S., and M. Div. Degrees. Also, I have recently been accepted as a candidate for the doctoral degree.

Before addressing the subject for this morning—"Keeping the Flame Burning."—I wish to briefly reminisce about some of the events that have happened over the years—some sad, some joyful. There have been departures because of hurt feelings, there have been departures because of other circumstances, there have been deaths, there have been baptisms, and there have been marriages. In this congregation, there have been many new comers. Many who no longer meet with Grassy are still some of the most faithful Christians whom I have ever known. Even though the departure of many have been very sad, nevertheless, Grassy continues to fight the good fight of faith. As one looks upon Grassy, one realizes that we all fight the ways of the flesh. We are all sinners saved by grace. Thank God for his grace!

## Deaths

Within the last seventeen years, I have witnessed the death of many believers who were members of this local body of Christians, many of whom are buried in the beautiful landscaped cemetery out back. It seems just a short time ago since Mildred Ponder passed away on June 30, 1988; she was 63 at the time of death. We all look forward to seeing Mildred in the ceaseless ages of eternity. Another great saint whom we all still miss very much is Ophelia Stone; she died in 1990 (date of birth: January, 17, 1914). She is now with the Lord. Everyone remembers Wade Cox (date of birth: October 3, 1906), a man who truly loved God. Silas Ponder still says, "Uncle Wade liked this song." Well, it hasn't been that long since Wade went to be with the Lord (September 19, 1995) at the age of 88. All of us remember L. S. Hornsby. He also went home to glory in November 1995 (age 77). The latest one to go to his heavenly home (January 26, 1998) in this congregation was Dude Blackman, who was 70 years old (date of birth: July 10, 1927). Yes, there are many, many more that could be mentioned, but these names illustrate the shortness of life. As one contemplates death, one cannot help but reflect upon the words of Moses:

<sup>3</sup> You turn men back to dust,  
saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men."

<sup>4</sup> For a thousand years in your sight  
are like a day that has just gone by,  
or like a watch in the night.

<sup>5</sup> You sweep men away in the sleep of death;  
they are like the new grass of the morning—

<sup>6</sup> though in the morning it springs up new,  
by evening it is dry and withered.

<sup>7</sup> We are consumed by your anger  
and terrified by your indignation.

<sup>8</sup> You have set our iniquities before you,  
our secret sins in the light of your presence.

<sup>9</sup> All our days pass away under your wrath;

we finish our years with a moan.

<sup>10</sup> The length of our days is seventy years—  
or eighty, if we have the strength;  
yet their span is but trouble  
and sorrow,  
for they quickly pass, and we fly away (**Psalms 90:3-10**).

## Baptisms

It seems as if it were just a few weeks ago that I baptized Terry Haga and her sister, Tammy Kelly (both were baptized on June 11, 1995). Then, on July 20, 1997, Larue Smith submitted to her Lord in baptism. Also, just recently, we witnessed the baptisms of Tarry Am Kelly (February 22, 1998) and Clay Daniel Scofield (March 1, 1998). There have been many others who have submitted themselves to the Lord in baptism, but this number is adequate to paint a picture of the desire of so many to render their lives to Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

## Marriages

On the 25<sup>th</sup> day of June, 1994, I was privileged to perform the marriage ceremony for Scott and Terri Haga. Also, Debbie and Perry Tidwell were married on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of August 1997. Both couples are now proud parents. I appreciate both couples inviting me to participate in joining their lives in holy matrimony.

## Keeping the Flame Burning

My departing comments are drawn from the words of Paul in his final farewell to Timothy.

I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. <sup>6</sup>

**For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.** <sup>7</sup> For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day (**2 Timothy 1:3-12**).

Paul is here encouraging Timothy to not allow the fire from God in his soul to go out, but rather to fan it into flame. The gift that Timothy received from Paul through his hands must be fanned into zeal. The gift is from God, but Timothy must blow it into a blaze. It is in this same vein that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: "Do not put out the Spirit's fire" (**2 Thessalonians 5:19**). Paul employs in this epistle the

same metaphor that he utilized to Timothy. One must always be on his or her safe guard to keep fire in one's life. Jesus, at least on one occasion, applied the figure of fire to His own ministry: **"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49).**

Timothy is to keep his own fire going. I remember as a young boy, during World War II, that people were singing, "Keep the Home Fires Burning." This is what Timothy is exhorted to do. This is what I am encouraging each of you to continue to do. Keep the fires burning for the Lord in your souls. Keep the desire burning for the souls of men and women and boys and girls. Many of you are here today because of godly parents, godly grandparents, godly uncles, godly aunts, and so on. Many of you have a rich heritage in the Christian faith even as Paul the apostle also had a rich heritage. Paul could write: "What anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? so am I." (**2 Corinthians 11:21-22**).

Paul also reminded Timothy of his pious heritage: "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also" (**2 Timothy 1:5**). Timothy's tears for Paul (**1:4**) reminded Paul of the two women who shaped Timothy's training. Nevertheless, in spite of your Christian training, every Christian must still remind himself or herself that genuine faith, such as Timothy had, is a personal matter and not a mere matter of inheritance. It is in this same vein that John the Baptist had to remind the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism against saying within themselves: "We have Abraham as our father" (**Matthew 3:9**). There must be personal change within us all. Every Christian is to produce fruit within his or her own life. There must be obedience to the commandments of God in your own life (**Matthew 5:18-20; 7:21-27**).

My prayer is that you will seek to capture the passion, the emotion, and the enthusiasm that Paul writes about in his letter to Rome: "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (**Romans 12:11-13**). It is also my aspiration to not allow my enthusiasm to burn low for the Lord's kingdom. Do you remember Jesus' letter to the Christians in Laodicea?

**These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth (Revelation 3:14-16).**

How many of you remember the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount about seeking the kingdom? Do you recall how he said to His disciples: **"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).** Are you seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Has your conversion changed your life? Are you grateful for what God has done for you? Are you grateful that God has called you into His service? Paul could write Timothy about his salvation in these soul searching words: "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service" (**1 Timothy 1:12**). Have you thanked God for your redemption from condemnation? When Jesus seized Paul on the Damascus Road, Paul turned his life around:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining

toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (**Philippians 3:12-14**).

### **Conclusion**

Have you turned your life around for God's service? In concluding my remarks today, may I remind each of you, as I also remind myself, of Paul's admonition to the Corinthians: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (**1 Corinthians 15:58**).

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#### **Preached:**

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